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ABSTRACT

Individualizing instruction is not in itself the answer to the problem of teaching all children to read. With the development of many new materials and devices, problems relative to meeting the needs of each child may be compounded. There is danger that the child may become isolated from what should be a community of learners. Reading as a social process is developed through social context. This includes a need for relevancy. Instead of enclosing learning within the four walls of the classroom, the outside world--the child's real world--can be brought in through the use of newspapers, film-making, research, current magazines, and other activities and materials. Whether a language-experience approach or a basal reader approach is used, reading materials can be selected which have meaning for the student. For learning to take place most effectively, it is necessary that the teacher and student together organize and structure a student-centered environment. Two important qualities of the teacher who can encourage this type of structure are (1) creativity and (2) the ability to develop a questioning attitude in her students which will lead to their making decisions and choice. References are included. (DH)

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CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN TEACHING READING

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The speakers in the different sections this morning will attempt to take the convention's theme "Reading and the Individual" and illustrate or describe in whatever way is appropriate what teachers and pupils can do to create an environment that encourages each pupil to develop to his greatest capacity within a framework of what is relevant and meaningful to him.

We live in a day when the word "relevancy" has a great deal of appeal. Students are not interested in the dictums and rules that made up the world of our generation; learning must have "relevancy" to a whole new set of ideas and ideals. Our purpose in individualizing instruction is of course to match as best we can the skills, interests, attitudes and aptitudes that a student brings to a pattern of instruction that hopefully he will see as relevant and that will bring about behavior change in terms of desirable objectives. To aid us in this matching and individualizing process are a great range of new and exciting materials, including working models for experiments, sound recordings, films, teaching machines, programmed materials and devices and all the rest that should help make almost any lesson burst into meaning and life. The technology and research that have produced the reading devices and prepackaged education have opened avenues for reaching even the most reluctant of students. Certainly it would seem reasonable to assume that these modern miracles of our technological achievement would emancipate the teacher from decision making relative to the broad spectrum of individual differences within the classroom. But unfortunately, automated classrooms make the application of what we know about readiness and individual differences a doubly difficult problem, rather than easing its complexities. What about preparation for

an ETV lesson, for example, or any other group media? Are some students surfeited with a repetition of ideas they already know because they're a part of a package deal? Are other students left with too little practice material because it does not appear in Box X? These decisions cannot be entirely automated; they require an expert's knowledge of testing and continuous evaluation.[1] But because we do on occasion forget to carefully match these automated, programmed types of materials to the individual through observation and continuous evaluation, we do not always make the processes of learning relevant. With a tendency to believe that these materials are an end in themselves, we too often make what was meant to be supplementary to his program the major part of his program, and in so doing we separate the pupil from his group and from the community processes of the classroom. Not only do we separate him psychologically and sometimes physically, but we separate him in terms of what he should learn, not so much in terms of skills, but in terms of becoming a cooperating human being. The disabled student in particular is too often separated and straight-jacketed in the name of individualizing the program, and like the proverbial little match girl, he only gets to peer in through the window toward the brighter lights, and the educational table more richly set than are the pickings from his own mismatched fare. He becomes an isolate within his class, consigned to his cubicle, doing his own lonely thing. Yet the omnipresent prepackaged material with its built-in directions seem like the final answer to the overworked teachers prayer, and we somehow believe that its magic will work where we have failed. So Johnnie is assigned to a kit and Mary to a gadget and Henry and Sam and Sue read the next episode in the basal reader. Everyone is individualized and the only thin line that holds

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[1]Paul C. Berg. "Excellent Teaching in an Automated Curriculum," The Slow Learning Child, 13 (July, 1966), 35-40.

them all together as a community of learners are the four walls and a teacher. In a classroom that has learned to be a community of cooperating learners, such a series of assignments have relevance, and learning takes place. When they are assigned as the last resort without context or reason or on a materials-centered rather than a student-centered point of view, then nothing that is done will in fact have real relevance.

In his latest book, Two Worlds of Childhood, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Professor of Psychology at Cornell and a founder of Head Start, decries patterns of individualizing that separate and alienate children from adults and even children from children. Rather, he states that classrooms should generate healthy "group competition and organized patterns of mutual help." Without radical innovation, he concludes, "It will be all children who are culturally deprived, not of cognitive stimulation, but of their humanity."[2]

Some years ago I had the opportunity to visit and observe a very large teacher-training practicum at the University of Virginia during the time that the clinic was directed by Dr. Bliesmer. In my opinion, the classroom organization had created an unusual community spirit and esprit de corps. There were thirty teachers and thirty students working together in a room probably no larger than one-and-a-half times the size of an ordinary classroom. While the noise level was high, so also was the enthusiasm among the small groups as they worked together, exchanged ideas, and cooperated in a multiplicity of ways toward the common goal of learning. I spent several days with this group, and can attest to the fact that

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[2] Urie Brofenbrenner, Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R. Basic Books, Inc., 1970.

while each worked toward the solution of his own goals in a variety of ways, there was an overriding community interest and spirit that held the group together as a group, not as single individuals lonely in the crowd.

For those of you who live in the East, I recommend visiting the Model Developmental Reading School in Greensboro, North Carolina. A year ago I observed this program in operation also. While here in this model school situation there was one teacher and teacher's aid per classroom, again the effective use of a wide variety of carefully selected materials was obvious, as well as was the individualized approach with many students doing many things at once. I did not see any lack of control which could be considered to be negative to the learning taking place, but rather I was much taken by the enthusiasm indicated by the teachers and how this enthusiasm was reflected in the students themselves.

From my observations and my own experiences, I am convinced that the dialogue of reading is a social process, developed through social context. Reading finds its motivation in language and the environment. While on one hand reading can be defined as relating sounds of speech to a written code, this simplistic definition does not explain why one wants to learn this complex relationship in the first place. Therefore, when we talk about individualizing instruction, we cannot mean removing the learner from the mainstream of his social world.

Thus far we have discussed the need for both teaching to read and learning to read to include the cohesive activities of one's own classroom. But more than the daily events of the classroom need to be a part of the learning activities available to the student. A hundred years ago, a student could tolerate the classroom sheltering him from the happenings

of the outside world, because the outside and the inside were pretty much the same. Now many kids feel that the confining walls of the classroom cheat them from the excitement of life and "being with it" on the outside. Therefore, day to day activities must also include some of the dynamics of our community and town and city and part of our national anxiety. Not only are the artifacts brought in, but kids are making the streets and the alleyways a part of the classroom experience. From these experiences reading finds a natural setting, and books and magazines and local newspapers and advertisements and street signs help to give direction and meaning to the students' explorations.

In the April, 1970 Issue of Think magazine there is an exciting article on one of the most provocative innovations to date--bringing experiences into the classroom through the medium of student-made movies. These movies are being made by school dropouts or problem students. Their teachers are finding that a roll of film, a camera and the freedom to depict their environment as they see it "turn on" these youngsters whom they have been unable to reach through regular classroom experiences. Moviemaking is decidedly "in" among senior high, junior high and even elementary school students, for in the Boston area alone, for example, more than 200 secondary schools offer some kind of film-making program.

One of the youngest and most active of the film-making groups is the P.S. 85 Film Club in the Bronx, New York. Every afternoon, weather permitting, its 20 members shoot location scenes. If it's a spy thriller they're filming, the backyards on Marion Avenue might make a good place for a lively chase sequence. If it's a documentary, then the junk-filled lot on East 184th Street is a favorite spot.[3]

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[3]Stanley L. Englebardt, "Lights, Camera, Action!" Think, 36 (March-April, 1970), 21-24.

For many of these students, this chance to deal immediately and directly with "where it's at" has opened up a whole new world for learning. These films have been sold and rented commercially and have in several instances been exhibited at film festivals and film-makers seminars. These kids are being kept in school and they are learning many things including how to read, for this is a necessary tool in the production of a film sequence.

Another similar illustration was carried by the Associated Press out of Newark, California. Here, a 13 year old eighth grader at MacGregor Junior High School was almost entirely responsible for arranging a week of drug-abuse education that taught 640 teen-agers what the drug scene is all about. She sent for some literature and learned that speakers, exhibits and movies were available. Her teachers responded enthusiastically to her plans. She contacted the State Narcotice Bureau in San Francisco, Alemeda County Authorities, and several private groups interested in the drug problem. All this grew out of a special report for her history class. It came about because a teacher and an administration were apparently not afraid to stimulate new possibilities for learning from any situation.

Let me compare this preceding illustration with what I saw some time ago as I visited a self-contained high school classroom that was made up of young men and women who were assumed to be terminal students. They were from culturally different backgrounds and had tested poorly on standardized tests of ability and achievement. I had been invited to observe because the teacher believed that she offered a program especially tailored to meet individual differences. Therefore my surprise when I found that the kind of materials being used were those common to any narrowly prescribed basal-oriented class. The only thing that I observed that was in any way different was the fact that the teacher lectured from

a mimeographed sheet while the students followed along with their copy. The subject of the sheet was far removed from any possible involvement that any of the students could have had. At the conclusion of the lecture, I asked the teacher if she used any kind of community information or resource for her reading and study activities, and I mentioned a present community crisis as a case in point. "No," the teacher answered, "Another teacher up the hall gets to use all the newspapers." The community crisis that I mentioned referred to the fact that this community was at this time totally involved in a very serious conservation problem, one that for weeks had found space in the national news services. All the local newspapers and other local news media daily gave major space to this situation that in one way or another threatened the livelihood of the community. The problem was one of industrial wastes polluting another part of the economy of the community. Think of all the exciting opportunities that this teacher had to engage her students with truly meaningful and relevant experiences for learning. The amount of independent research, the kinds of available materials directly related to the problem, and the student productions that could be the outcome of these experiences, are legion. Consider independent research. The teacher could have helped schedule speakers from the industry, interviews could have been set up for students, and field trips could have been scheduled to observe the situation first hand. The science students could have made maps of the prevailing winds and water currents which were involved, or taken samples of both air and water for analysis. In terms of critical evaluations, studies could be made between the reports of the industry concerning its pollution level and the reports of the federal monitoring systems that surely are in

operation at this location. In terms of available reading material, I have already commented on the local and state coverage of the situation. But further, government bulletins are available, at least touching upon parallel situations, industrial brochures are available for the asking, newspaper and T.V. script could be obtained and ad infinitum. And think of the fun of producing relevant materials as a result of this study and reading. News reports could be written, T.V. plays and scripts could be developed, and letters to local and state representatives could be written and sent. Yet all the while these kids sat in a classroom devoid of any interest except a teacher reading and lecturing from a mimeographed sheet about how the federal government is organized; and this to low capacity, terminal, high school students! If this teacher had a special compulsion to teach about the function of the federal government, the March 16th issue of Scholastic Teacher outlined in detail a plan that would have been ideal for her purposes. The article I refer to, titled "A Unique Chance to Involve Your Students in the Workings of Government," gave a number of suggestions for involving students in the national census. Special programs for the student council were described, role playing activities for typical situations that might occur during the home visitation were suggested, and a series of questions were included to help spark class discussion. Readings about the census were carried by Scholastic's Scope, and follow-up activities were also given.

Of course the question might be raised, and correctly so, that literally millions of children have learned to read by highly pre-structured basal reading programs like Dick and Jane and that millions more are likely to do so. The point might also be argued that if the basal reader approach

can do the job, why become involved in a language experience approach that is time consuming and expensive in both time and money? The point is, during the heyday of the basal reader, the child whose education was deemed important and carefully fostered lived in a world like Dick and Jane and for these children the basal approach was in effect, a language experience approach. The language of the office-working father, the middle class home and the activities of the white collar community are neatly portrayed and communicated from the basal reader to the child who was born and raised in such an environment. But the solidarity of social class and homogenous language groupings have broken down in our schools and with this transition, Dick and Jane will for many have to be recreated in another image. I am not advocating the demise of the basal reader. That is the wonderful part about individualizing. For some, Dick and Jane and all the other characters that have figured so importantly in the educational melieu of our youth still find their counterparts in the children of hundreds of communities. But for many children, such as the ones I described in the terminal classroom situation, new models and new situations must be created out of the stuff that make up their patterns of daily living. Children whose reading skills are being developed by use of language patterns and situations drawn from life on the other side of town can still join with their entire class in common activities that draw from problems relevant to allsocial classes and language patterns. For example, the ecological problem engulfing a whole town is certainly large enough to interest all students, whatever their level of attainment or ability. If a boy's dad is a fisherman, he doesn't have to have a great deal of ability to realize that the pollutants from a factory may destroy his father's livelihood. He can at least be given the job of sitting

along the river for ten minutes each day to count the dead fish that float by in that length of time. I'm not being facetious--such a count would be a part of an ecological study of pollution damage. Surely, then, if your classroom is engaged in relevant projects, there is something that each can do that demands his skills, his interests, and his energy. A moment ago I mentioned that the characters within the basal reader still find their counterparts in millions of kids across the country, but still for many students, these materials are not relevant. Dr. George Spache has aided in extending the relevancy and application of some sixteen basal readers through a series of publications by Follett Library Book Company. These new publications are lists of supplementary books, graded to relatively exact reading levels, that are correlated to the contents of the basal reading series, page by page. Approximately 40 different publishers' materials are graded and listed, accounting for over 6000 titles, and correlated to the basal readers relative to subject and interest levels. For example, if you are using American Adventures, 4th Reader, nearly 250 reference titles are listed under over 40 topic headings. These are compared page by page with the stories in American Adventures. With this reference aid, and a reasonably large holding of these selected supplementary materials, surely a Dick or Jane can be found to fit any condition or circumstance.

There have been at least three basic concepts that I hold about how reading develops that have been inherent in the preceding remarks and illustrations. They are that the ability to read must be based on language already in the possession of the reader; second, the more immediately related this language is to the student's basic needs, direct activities, and interests, the more energy it has to generate recognition for symbols

which stand for it. Third, however limited a child's language is that he brings, it is enough to begin immediately the long spiral upward to literacy. The work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner as related in her book Teacher illustrates the strength of organic language for investing itself with the coded representations of writing. These points can best be summed up by stating that learning to read, beginning with word meaning and recognition through comprehension to critical analysis, can be accomplished through materials that have primary, immediate value to the student. Let's consider word meaning. I am appalled at the lists of words that are seemingly derived from nowhere in particular that are given to students to learn. A language basis for learning to read or learning anything else, for that matter, is not built by sending home long vocabulary lists for students to memorize. If this is the way to directly build vocabulary, then I am against direct vocabulary development. Webster's College Dictionary defines vocabulary as "a list of collection of words or of words and phrases, usually alphabetically arranged and explained or defined." This definition of vocabulary leads me further to believe that one does not learn vocabulary as such, but vocabulary is simply the name by which we order or tally the working parts of our language. Language, according to Webster, is "the faculty of verbal expressions and use of words in human intercourse; the words themselves in their grammatical relationships." Language, then, is what we learn, and we learn it, not passively by rote and list, but by an active engagement with it.

Another factor in reading is comprehension. I again consulted Webster. This word means "to embody, or involve oneself with." Again, note the feeling of direct confrontation, of contact beyond the superficial. Looking at the typical exercises that purport to teach comprehension

skills, I am prone to believe that most of them do not involve the student in other but a cursory fashion, surely not at an organic level described by Ashton-Warner, and surely not to the point of genuine relevancy. While a sampling of workbook exercises may give direction to <u>how</u> comprehension takes place, to literally "comprehend" in any true sense one must be involved with a context that contains more than the syntatical sum of its parts--it must be a context that engages one's interests and emotions when once he sets out to comprehend it.

Of course the art of critical analysis bases itself on having a point of reference about what one reads. I can't critically analyze a text if I do not have an opinion or personal standard from which to judge. Again, the typical materials developed for teaching critical reading skills may show <u>how</u> it is done but cannot in any real spirit of the activity create enough substantive text and context to engage the reader directly in a structure of relevancy necessary for this subjective, objective, and analytical task.

My preceding remarks and illustrations have also indicated that learning takes place in an organized and structured environment, but that this structure and organization develops within the atmosphere of a teacher-student dialogue, not superimposed from above. Piaget has said that "teaching means creating situations where structures can be discovered; it does not mean transmitting structures which may be assimilated at nothing other than a verbal level." Too often, I have suggested, we transmit the structure rather than creating possibilities for the child to invent and discover. In 1966, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development of the NEA produced the publication, <u>Learning and Mental</u>

Health in School. In it the authors discussed implications of a cognitive field theory that underscore the concept of Piaget. To quote them, "the primary function of the teacher is to help the students to discover problems that demand their personal attention. Giving students answers to problems they do not have short-ci cuits the whole process of learning by making exploration and reality testing by the students unnecessary and the problem unimportant."

What criteria should be considered in encouraging the selection of a structure for learning? First of all, as we have suggested, it should be student-centered. Also, a project or structure that becomes a vehicle for learning should be capable of engendering opportunity to practice in a meaningful setting all the sub-skills that are required for completion of the project or problem. Once the educational pump is primed, the learning processes should be self-regenerating by the nature of the learning activities. This self-actuating process should be in the model of a spiral. That is, growth in the language stemming from the project produces a larger stock of words recognized in writing which produces greater comprehension ability which creates a greater background for critical evaluation. But this spiral of learning is not a thin line; it accumulates breadth and depth, with each of the skills interacting with the others, giving words, comprehension, and critical evaluation the context of language in use, rather than the barren context of a few miscelleneous words strung together.

What are the characteristics of the teacher who makes all this possible? I shall not enumerate all the qualifications that surely would be as demanding as those required of a person to sit on the Supreme Court, but I will mention two. These are, one, the ability to be creative, and two, the ability to foster, by the use of questions, a questioning

attitude on the part of students. In a way, creative behavior is what has been described in the preceding illustrations taken from school situations. Quoting from a paper written earlier on the art of teaching and the creative teacher, I had said that the "creative teacher's thinking is sensitive to problems, fluent, flexible and adaptive, spontaneous and original. It is integrative and non-rigid. It utilizes critical analysis, but goes beyond it, producing new ideas rather than concerning itself with pre-established conditions and ground rules."[4]

We have said that the most effective way to bring about behavioral change is through the student's own decisions and choices. A major problem, of course, is that many students do not have the experience to know what structures to use as a vehicle for learning. The ability of the teacher to offer guidance in these daily decisions through skillful questioning will have a direct effect on the ability of the student to develop the art of being curious--to question, and to build learning structures from the stimulation of a questioning attitude. Studies in psychology have indicated clearly that students' learning behavior is directed more by questions than any type of lecture.

In October of 1968 the Instructor carried a study by William Floyd.[5] Floyd selected from administrative ratings the 40 best teachers in a city school system. He recorded a significant amount of verbal activity in these teacher's classes and separated out for study the verbal activity that dealt

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[4]Paul C. Berg and Victor M. Rentel, "Guides to Creativity in Reading," Journal of Reading, X, No. 4 (January, 1967), 219-230.

[5]William D. Floyd, "Do Teachers Talk Too Much?", Instructor, 78 (Oct., 1968).

with teacher-student questions. Of all questions asked, 96 percent were asked by the teachers, only 4% by students. This 4% was divided between 802 students. One teacher got so carried away by her own voice that she fired off 198 questions without the students having an opportunity to answer back. Only 5% of the teacher's questions demanded a thought answer, or seemed capable of demanding any stimulating reflection on the part of students. Eighty-five percent of these questions fell into two categories--memory for facts, and information. Questions almost never used were those dealing with problem solving, the students' interests, or for helping to locate students' problem areas in learning. In another study, only 10% of 190 teachers even believed that teacher questions should deal with generalizations and inferences.[6]

Do you use an effective questioning technique in order to help students find their best structures for learning? While many do's and don'ts might be listed as questioning technique, perhaps the best one to leave you with is: "Do your questions, and the kinds of questions your students ask zero in, finally, on the kind of questions every student asks, if only silently, "How is what we are doing and you are talking about related to me as a person?"

I have tried to talk to you about reading and relevancy. If I were to summarize, it would be that technology and methods derived from the most careful research cannot take the place of the heart and soul of the teacher. In fact, the 1st and 2nd grade research studies of '64 and '65 proved that. A wise man once said, and I think it must apply particularly to us who teach: now add to your knowledge faith and hope, but beyond all these, add love.

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[6]Robert T. Pate and Neville H. Bremer, "Guiding Learning Through Skillful Questioning," Elementary School Journal, 67 (May 1967), 417-422.

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